

Historical Development Overview on Cucurbit Flute Music

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Abstract. This paper analyzes the development history of cucurbit flute music from a historical perspective, discusses the traditional development stage and contemporary development stage of cucurbit flute music, and focuses on the contemporary development characteristics and development reasons of cucurbit flute music.

Brief introduction of cucurbit flute music

Cucurbit flute, also named cucurbit Xiao, is a wind instrument of the Achang nationality, the Dai nationality, the Yi nationality, etc. In Dai language, cucurbit flute is also called “Bi Lang Tao”. “Bi” refers to the general term of blowing instrument of the Dai nationality; “Lang” refers to direct blowing; “Tao” refers to cucurbit. In other words, it means “Bi” with cucurbit for direct blowing is a kind of reed pipe blowing instrument. Traditional cucurbit flute (shown as the following picture) uses cucurbit to make loudspeaker box. Three bamboo pipes of various lengths are inserted into the cucurbit parallelly, and a cooper reed of sharp tongue shape will be embedded into the part in cucurbit of each pipe. The longest pipe is taken as main pipe with seven sound holes (with six in front and one behind). It is as long as 30 cm. The player blows the small end with mouth, and presses on the finger holes on the main pipe. When blowing the melody, the left and right bamboo pipes (also called assistant pipes) will generate two sustaining bass at the same time to constitute all kinds of summation tone ^[1]. Cucurbit flute is a kind of instrument with distinguishing features and unique appearance. Nowadays, the cucurbit flute is also considered as good-looking handiwork. It has lithe, elegant and graceful tone. Cucurbit flute can be grouped into high-pitch cucurbit flute (f tone and d tone), middle-pitch cucurbit flute (c tone and falling B tone), and low-pitch cucurbit flute (G tone, F tone and D). The voice register of cucurbit flute is a little bit narrow. Taking the instrument of c tone as an example, its voice register is from e^1 to a^2 .

Cucurbit flute music refers to the music played by cucurbit flute instrument which is mostly in form of solo and ensemble. At early stage, it was mainly spread in the minority areas of Yunnan Province. In agricultural society, such kind of music was confined to a certain area. However, with the development of modern spread means, the instruments have the characteristics like convenience for carrying, cheap price, simpleness and easiness for learning, suitable for both young and old, etc. Such kind of music has got out of local places, and its unique artistic charm has been popularized gradually in way of public music culture spread. Traditional cucurbit flute has the national customs of the Dai nationality. With the social function of cucurbit flute which was taken as “love and marriage media”, traditional cucurbit flute music is mainly the theme of love. It also describes the scenery and expresses emotion which mostly originates from local folk music. With the further spread of cucurbit flute, the cucurbit flute music has been equipped with diversified characteristics. People of various regions and nations like playing cucurbit flute. The topic content and expression form of cucurbit flute start to show all kinds of changes. Nowadays, the cucurbit flute music is mainly in form of solo with rich and diversified subjects. Compared with the solo of other national instruments, cucurbit flute solo has simple musical form structure, short music and rich expressive force.

At present, cucurbit flute music is mainly spread in society in form of public music, but it is completely different from general public music (like pop music). It belongs to the essence of Chinese national music culture. Especially with the mutual endeavor of current cucurbit flute musicians, cucurbit flute solo music is full of artistic expressionism. The cucurbit flute instrument has been

turned from folk instrument to national instrument, and cucurbit flute music has become a part of social music activities.

Development of traditional cucurbit flute music

Cucurbit flute music develops along with the improvement of cucurbit flute instrument. Cucurbit flute originates from some folk legends, which is closely linked with the cucurbit culture of southwestern ethnic minorities. The image of cucurbit is connected with the form of heaven and earth, and similar to the gestational matrix, so people offer cucurbit the object of reproduction worship. Cucurbit flute as the derivative of cucurbit culture image also has such kind of myth function. The history of cucurbit flute can be traced back to the pre-Qin period when it was transformed from gourd pipe. Its structure still maintains the remaining structure of ancient instruments; its sound pipe number is exactly same with He with three pipes; two assistant pipes with no sound hole are also the same as ancient Xiao; its continuous fifth interval is quite similar to the “for echoing the numerous sounds” of ancient He. But the seven sound holes on its main pipe are very similar to the clarinet in later ages, showing its historical leap ^[3]. The improvement of cucurbit flute instrument mainly happens in recent years. People improve the traditional cucurbit flute in accordance with its various kinds of functional requirement, tone and voice register requirement, and artistic expression requirement. For example, the bamboo reed is changed to cooper reed and additional keys. Cucurbit flute is added with middle pitch si and high pitch dol, expanding its voice register.

Cucurbit flute changes along with the constant development of cucurbit flute instrument's improvement technology. Their synchronous development embodies the transition process of cucurbit flute from folk instrument to national instrument which has relatively strong artistic expressive force. Reform and development of social relationship as well as the change of love and marriage ways in the Dai nationality causes the disappearance of main social function of cucurbit flute which is taken as “love and marriage media”. At the same time, with the constant change of people's spiritual life pursuit and the development of social culture market, the entertainment function and commodity function of cucurbit flute music gradually emerge. As a result, cucurbit flute music achieves new prosperity.

Traditional cucurbit flute music as local national customs and culture passes on from generation to generation. As a kind of folk instrument, cucurbit flute music mainly contains “ancient tone of cucurbit flute” and “ancient love song tone” of the Dai nationality with national specificity. “Ancient tone of cucurbit flute” is called “Xing Bi Ban Tao” in Dai language. “Ban Tao” refers to the old generation. “Ancient love song tone” is called “Calling Ban Tao”. “Xing Bi Ban Tao” and “Calling Ban Tao” gradually passes on from generation to generation with the same inheritance condition and inheritance way as cucurbit flute. Its contents are mostly love songs which express thoughts and emotions through blowing cucurbit flute. Its blowing form is relatively stable. “Xing Bi Ban Tao” can only be played by cucurbit but “Calling Ban Tao” can be sang and also played by cucurbit flute. “Ancient tone of cucurbit flute” has many prolonged sounds, rich combination tones, and sincere melodious tone. Due to different emotion, life experience and living environment of players, different lingering charms will be expressed. Therefore, girls can recognize the objects by listening to the cucurbit flute music. Blowing “ancient tone of cucurbit flute” needs both assistant pipes and circulatory air exchange method, so that people can express complicated thoughts and emotions. “Ancient tone of cucurbit flute” sounds painful and mournful, so it is also called “crying tone”. With the property expansion of cucurbit flute instrument, especially after changing bamboo reed with cooper reed, the volume of cucurbit flute instrument has been turned up with more stable property and full tone. Cucurbit flute music also achieves rapid development. Firstly, folk song materials like *Mangshi Bazi Tone*, *Jingpo Love Song*, etc are gradually added into the contents of “love song” theme, which has already expanded the artistic expression of cucurbit flute music and added the music elements of various nationalities. Cucurbit flute starts to turn from folk instrument to national instrument. However, the nationality at that moment was still confined to the minorities in Yunnan. When the original songs with national features and some popular interlude songs in films are played with cucurbit flute, the perfect combination of beautiful national minority melody and cucurbit flute

unique tone is finally realized, making these songs the classic in cucurbit flute music. It strengthens the nationality of cucurbit flute music and also plays a certain role in the further spread of cucurbit flute music. Typical examples of such kind of songs contain *The Vow of Marriage*, *The Fern Leaf Hedge Bamboo in the Moonlight*, *A Wonderful Place*, *Besides the Butterfly Spring*, etc. It is not difficult to blow these songs with cucurbit flute, which is corresponding to the characteristics of cucurbit flute. In addition, due to the high popularity of these songs and the rapid development of modern spread technology, these songs have made indelible contribution to the popularization development of cucurbit flute music in a long term.

In 1977, after widely absorbing the folk music materials of the Dai nationality, a cucurbit flute concert performer of Dai nationality named Gong Quanguo created a cucurbit flute solo *Deep in Bamboo Mountain* with a composer named Yang Zhengxi. The solo was later showed on the entertainment stage, achieving sensational effects and starting the development of cucurbit flute music stage performance and solo music. The simultaneous development of cucurbit flute solo and popularization of cucurbit flute meets the spiritual life demands of people from all walks of society. Therefore, cucurbit flute music culture market came into being. With the pushing force of cultural market, cucurbit flute music started to make great strides. Following *Deep in Bamboo Mountain*, plenty of excellent cucurbit flute solos appeared like *Ruilimei* (composed by Wei Mingru), *Beautiful Golden Peacock* (composed by Yang Jiansheng), *Golden Color Pasture* (composed by Wang Tiechui), *Welcome Spring* (composed by He Weiqing), *Golden Peacock* (composed by Yu Tianyou and Hu Yunji), *Pastoral Song* (composed by Li Zhen), *Spring Reaches the Grassland* (composed by Yan Tieming), *The Fishing Song* (composed by Yan Tieming), *Happy Water-sprinkling Festival* (composed by Zhou Chenglong and Zhang Zuyu), *Bamboo House Love Song* (composed by Li Haiying), *Beside the Mengyang River* (composed by Gen Dequan), *Going to Market* (composed by Yin Maoquan and Gen Dequan), *The Night of Bannan* (composed by Cao Pengju), *Deep Love of Achang* (composed by Lin Rongchang), *Love Song of Dai Village* (composed by Wang Ciheng), etc. All these songs started to use Chinese traditional folk music creation mode “free rhythm- adagio (moderato) - allegro- moderato (adagio) - ending”. Compared with folk songs, it has larger length and more complicated musical form. Moreover, all kinds of playing skills have been applied in the songs. As for the expression theme, these songs embody the transition process from Yunan Dai nationality style to multiple nationalities style, and also the further development of cucurbit flute as solo instrument.

Contemporary development of cucurbit flute music

After 2000, the rapid development of cucurbit flute music showed the following characteristics:

Firstly, cucurbit flute music elements have been added into the pop music. With the constant popularization of teaching, more and more people are able to blow cucurbit flute, and a kind of cucurbit flute music form which is easier to be popularized appears at the same time. That is pop music material. Directly blowing pop music with cucurbit flute will make learners more interested. Some pop music even adopts the orchestration of cucurbit flute like *Making Mistakes*, *Chrysanthemums Terrace*, etc. which makes cucurbit flute able to be popularized on a broader platform and more popular. Pop music which can be blown by cucurbit flute mainly contains *Wonderful Myth*, *Blue and White Porcelain*, *Xiao Wei*, etc.

Secondly, cucurbit flute is used to play foreign songs like Canada folk song *Red River Valley*, Malaysia folk song *Sing Sing So*, etc.

Thirdly, composers recompose the Chinese classic traditional instrumental music. For example, Li Chunhua recomposes the erhu music *Horse Racing* (composed by Huang Haihuai), Wang Houchen recomposes *Dance of the Yao People*, etc.

Finally, the development of cucurbit flute sole shows new characteristics. The tone of cucurbit flute has extremely strong personality, so it is rather difficult to integrate it with other instruments or the band. Therefore, cucurbit flute music is mostly solo, ensemble or unison. As for selection of orchestration, cucurbit flute usually appears in form of characteristic music. Wei Sijian's *Meng Jiangnv*, which refers to the kanadeai of cucurbit flute and band, is a successful attempt. But such kind

of products is extremely rare. Cucurbit flute solo usually adopts the form of electroacoustic accompany, which has become a universal method.

The contemporary development of cucurbit flute solo embodies the Chinese national style and characteristic from a large national perspective, which is no longer confined to the national minority material and Yunnan region. It represents the trend of general development around China and becomes a representative Chinese national cultural characteristic. This point has been mentioned in the creative style of a young cucurbit flute music composer named Li Chunhua, like *Saussurea Involucrata Blossom* of Xingjiang music style, *Broken Bridge and Waning Moon* of Jiangnan Shaoxing opera material, *Pear Blossom Rain* of Henan opera material, etc. Wang Houchen in Shanxi Song and Dance Theater creates *Love for Baliu* and *Love for the Yellow Soil* on basis of Shanxi opera. While the *Wild Wolf* composed by Zhao Hongxiao represents the higher level development of cucurbit flute music.

In October 2009 and October 2013, the Cucurbit Flute Association of Chinese Ethnic Orchestral Music Association held twice “Binhu Cup” National Cucurbit Flute Original Work Competition in Hefei Anhui. The award-winning works are mostly solos like *The Fountain of the Desert* (composed by Wu Qilin), *The Bonfire Carnival Night* (composed by Zhang Xiao), *Early Spring of Yimeng* (composed by Zhang Baohe and Zhang Rundong), *A Spring Morning of Binhu* (composed by Zheng Jiayu), etc. Their themes and creative skills enrich the expressive force of cucurbit flute music. Two years of National Cucurbit Flute Original Work Competition exert a pushing influence on the contemporary development of cucurbit flute music.

Since the year of 2000, reasons for the rapid development of cucurbit flute music are mainly travel, media, teaching, etc. Yunnan’s tourism card sets a solid foundation for the spread of cucurbit flute music; new communications media like broadcast, television, advertisement, Internet, and telephone facilitate the rapid development of cucurbit flute music to a maximum extent, and directly push forward the development of cucurbit flute teaching. However, the wide application of cucurbit flute teaching activities in society and schools is a kind of effective spread means and also a kind of representation of cucurbit flute music’s prosperous development.

It is not difficult to discover in the carding process of above cucurbit flute music development that cucurbit flute instrument has experienced a transition process from folk instrument to national instrument and from national instrument to solo instrument. The representation of cucurbit flute music art has been gradually reinforced in its developing process. Its cultural carrier also experiences the transition process from folk culture to national music culture and from national music culture to professional creative music culture. Cucurbit flute music has its own cultural carrier and cultural attribute. Such kind of cultural attribute facilitates the prosperity of cucurbit flute music, which is also embodied in the cucurbit flute music.

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